

On Writing
(personal statement submitted as part of a poetry competition submission)

I write as a means of more fully inhabiting my self and the world and investigating macro questions on a micro scale. Via the rhythms and textures of words, I seek to probe and transcribe the silent registers of inner experience and the tensions between mind/body, self/other, freedom/connection. Alienation, desire, and (dis-) embodiment are recurring themes throughout my work and reflect what has been, for me, an ongoing struggle to feel at home in my body, in my mind, and in the world. I am drawn to the stuttering rhythms of the individual life, and these rhythms are what I strive to record.

Reading widely has been essential to my development as both a human being and a writer. Like many a teenager and young adult, I found that literature gave discernible shape and form to the confounding dynamics of my own inner life. Modernist and contemporary writers were and remain key influences—H.D., Mann, Kafka, Proust, Woolf, Musil, and Nabokov were early revelations, later joined by Paul Celan, René Char, Roland Barthes, Albert Camus, and C.D. Wright. My first literary idol was perhaps Henry James—he deployed language with such ruthless yet opulent precision, crafting riverine sentences that carried me away yet always, eventually, crashed me up against the walls of human struggle. I can still be mesmerized by the rigor and decadence of his style, which mapped with a singular forensic attention the topography of social experience. Though I increasingly seek in my own writing to distill and deconstruct, I continue to read James with awe and a conviction that his prolixity—certainly a poor term for such mastery—served as the necessary vehicle for his incisive critiques.

My writing is driven by an experimental curiosity and frequently explores the intersections between poetic form and narrative. Elements of story, character, and dialogue punctuate much of my poetic work, yet these elements never quite cohere. Rather, they function suggestively as displaced shards from a shattered, or perhaps non-existent, whole. Enacting a dance of revelation and obfuscation, these elements allow me to engage and elucidate the fractured, shifting nature of impressions and sensations and the fluidity and uncertainty of identity. Voices shift and internal and external worlds collide, and English sometimes meets or commingles with French. I approach language with a synesthetic attention to

its raw material qualities—shape, rhythm, volume, texture, weight, and color—and I am deeply interested in the capacity of literature to co-opt and redeploy extraliterary techniques. I was trained in viola and cello and have pursued extensive studies in film, and I currently practice photography and play keyboard. In my poetry, I often draw on musical dynamics and experimental production strategies—remixing, sampling, vocal manipulation—prevalent in EDM and hip-hop. The shape and movement of words across a page, the de- and reconstruction of a phrase, and the spatial evocation of sound and silence are essential questions and processes in my writing.

In *Metaphors on Vision*, filmmaker Stan Brakhage hinted at a fascinating paradox of language when he wrote, “How many colors are there in a field of grass to the crawling baby unaware of ‘Green?’”¹ For me, to explore poetic form is often to explore precisely that which is excluded or eliminated by language through the process of naming, of assigning word to object. It is, equally, to blow open words themselves and access their expressive reserves.

I feel that language can both bridge and broaden the space between feeling and thought, self and other, body and mind. The capacity to alternately clarify or confuse, seduce or threaten, condemn or celebrate is an extraordinary source of power. How and to what effect that power is exercised via naming, telling, and remembering interests me deeply. I discovered early that to give a name to a feeling, to recall in words an experience, is to make it terribly, irrevocably real. Bruno Schulz once wrote that the “essence of reality is meaning...what has no meaning is not real for us.”² The inverse is, I believe, equally true: what is not real to us has no meaning. And yet reality, as experienced, is nebulous, fluid, and deeply subjective. When we filter that reality through language, it becomes present to us in a way that is deceptively legible. Our relationship to reality then shifts as we encounter it no longer through the body but through the mind. Yet language can also bring us back into visceral, full-bodied contact with our lived experience. And for me, writing is a way of accessing that lived experience through a kind of hidden door. It is, for me, a form of living in itself.

¹ Stan Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision* (New York: Anthology Film Archives/Light Industry [1963], 2017).

² Bruno Schulz, “The Mythicisation of Reality,” *Studio* no. 3–4 (1936).